

# E-mail Etiquette



Story by SFC Lisa Beth Snyder

**W**HILE e-mail has become a standard way of doing business in the Army, the regulations and customs for using this form of communication are still evolving.

Department of Defense Directive 5500.7-R, "Joint Ethics Regulation," Section 2-301, is the basis for Army policy on the use of government telecommunications and computing systems that are found in Army Regulation 25-1, "Army Information Management."

The directive states that Army employees are authorized to contact family about changes in travel plans while traveling on government business. They may also conduct personal communications from the work place that are most reasonably made while there. Examples are checking in with family, scheduling doctor and auto or home repair appointments, brief Internet searches or e-mailing directions to visiting relatives, as long as the communications are short and do not interfere with the job.

Employees may be disciplined if they use government computers to access or spread pornography, anti-government information or gambling

schemes; send chain e-mail messages; conduct unofficial commercial or political activities; or engage in any activity that is illegal or discredits the government.

The government may monitor all information, including personal information placed on or sent over DOD computer systems, personal user files and directories, and any use of the Internet or records created by the Internet. Logging onto a government system implies consent to this policy. Unauthorized use of DOD computer systems may subject users to administrative, criminal or other adverse action.

When logging onto an Army computer, you are agreeing not to interfere with communication systems. This means you must refrain from:

- ❶ Creating, downloading, storing, copying, transmitting, or broadcasting chain letters.
- ❷ "Spamming," that is, widely distributing unsolicited e-mail.
- ❸ Sending a "letter-bomb," that is, resending the same e-mail message repeatedly to one or more recipients, interfering with the recipient's use of e-mail.
- ❹ Broadcasting unsubstantiated

virus warnings from sources other than systems administrators.

- ❺ Broadcasting e-mail messages to large groups of e-mail users (entire organizations) instead of targeting smaller populations.

U.S. Army Forces Command has published guidelines that help e-mail users apply Army regulations to their electronic communications. [*See accompanying box.*]

Technology writers also add a few additional rules to the FORSCOM list.

Seattle Times columnist Charles Bermant warns his readers not to send jokes or unsolicited attachments and to simplify their auto-signature block to avoid clogging people's e-mail boxes.

James Martin of PCWorld.com adds another caution about using e-mail to send sensitive messages. These, he wrote recently, are best delivered in person or by telephone if face-to-face communication is not possible.

Most systems managers and computer specialists agree that knowing and following the rules will help to reduce the time wasted on unnecessary e-mail traffic and help ensure that e-mail users don't commit unintended criminal or unethical activities. □

# Guidelines for E-mail Using

U.S. Army Forces Command has posted the following e-mail guidelines on its website, <http://freddie.forscom.army.mil/dcsc4/etiq.pdf>.

- ❖ Observe the Golden Rule - be courteous and conscientious.
- ❖ Be professional and careful regarding what you say about others. Remember, it is very easy to forward messages, and what you say may be forwarded to an unintended audience.
- ❖ Write complete sentences but be concise. Do not use all CAPS when writing — that is normally construed to be shouting at the recipient. Conversely, do not write in all lower case, as this shows poor writing style.
- ❖ Use a spell checker.
- ❖ Use discretion in forwarding e-mail, especially from general officers or senior executive service members.
- ❖ Address your e-mail only to those who need to respond to the message. Courtesy copy (cc) anyone who needs to be kept informed but does not need to respond.
- ❖ Do not use the "Reply All" button when answering a message sent to a large group. Usually the rest are not concerned with your response, and it often triggers numerous other messages as addressees banter over the use of "Reply All."
- ❖ Use a descriptive subject line. If you reply to a message but talk about a different subject, change the subject line to reflect the new subject matter.
- ❖ Follow the chain of command unless specifically asked for a direct reply.
- ❖ Answer messages within a reasonable time. If you will be out of the office for more than a day or so, use the "Out of Office Assistant" feature. Also, remember the "Rules Wizard" feature is available to forward your e-mail to the person filling in for you.
- ❖ Do not send chain letters or forward virus warnings. It is the responsibility of the mail administrator to forward e-mail concerning viruses. — *FORSCOM Public Affairs Office*

